

NEWS RELEASE

Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision – Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests

Website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/BlueMtnsPlanRevision>

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February 3, 2014

Forest Service Public Meetings Set for the Revision of the Forest Plans

Baker City, OR – The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Revised Land Management Plan (commonly known as the Forest Plan) for the Malheur, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, and a portion of the Ochoco National Forest (Blue Mountains National Forests) is scheduled to be released to the public on March 14, 2014 for a 90-day comment period. On March 17, the first of twelve public meetings will begin to share information about the DEIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan, to explain the commenting process, and to listen to the public.

“Our goal is to develop a Forest Plan with public input, for all three Forests that do the right thing for the landscape, while balancing the social and economic issues”, shared Kevin Martin, Umatilla Forest Supervisor.

Where are the Forests in the process? In 2010, after six years of collaborative work with the public, local, state, and tribal governments, the Proposed Action was released for public comment. All of the public comments were reviewed and analyzed, and the following issues were identified: access, ecological resilience (restoration), economic and social well-being, livestock grazing/grazing land vegetation, old forest, and wilderness. Based on these issues, a series of alternatives have been developed and analyzed in the DEIS. The co-convenor group, which was established in 2004 involving county and state cooperators, and the Tribal government, have been working collaboratively with the Forest Service to assist in drafting the proposed action and subsequently providing feedback for the DEIS and Draft Forest Plan. The Draft Forest Plan has been developed based on the Agency’s preferred alternative.

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“We are now at the point in the NEPA process where we release the DEIS and Draft Forest Plan for the public to comment on the range of alternatives and analysis of the alternatives in the DEIS. The alternatives vary in terms of plan components such as, the management areas, suitable uses, desired conditions, standards and guidelines, objectives, and monitoring. Over the next year or so, we will be working together with interested public to finalize a Forest Plan for each Forest. We hope by the end of the summer 2015 to have Forest Plans in place for each Forest to guide implementation”, stated John Laurence, Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor.

A Forest Plan is a document that guides land management decisions (project or site-specific level planning) for a period of about 15 years. The Forest Plan is strategic in nature and does not approve projects or actions on National Forest System (NFS) lands; for example it does not close specific roads, trails, or areas – further NEPA and public engagement is required on these types of site-specific level decisions.

The Forest Service is developing the Forest Plans for these three Forests under the 1982 Planning Rule. Continuing to use the 1982 Planning Rule is permitted under provisions of the new 2012 Planning Rule. The monitoring section of the Forest Plan will meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule, as is required under Forest Service policy.

Steve Beverlin, Acting Malheur Forest Supervisor emphasized, “it is critical that the public become involved and provide input on the draft Forest Plan and DEIS. Attend one of the meetings in your local area. This input will help us determine what the final Forest Plans will look like.”

Following is the schedule for the public meetings, which begin on March 17th, and all of the meetings are 5:30 – 8:30 pm:



Date	Location
3/17/14	Malheur National Forest - Federal Building, Juniper Hall 431 Patterson, John Day, OR
3/18/14	Malheur National Forest - Chamber of Commerce Community Center 484 N. Broadway Center, Burns, OR
3/19/14	Malheur National Forest - Long Creek Community Center 201 W. 2nd Street, Long Creek, OR
3/20/14	Wallowa-Whitman National Forest - Cloverleaf Hall 668 NW 1st St. (Hwy 3), Enterprise, OR
3/25/14	Wallowa-Whitman National Forest - Baker County Fairgrounds (Event Center) 2600 East Street, Baker City, OR
3/26/14	Wallowa-Whitman National Forest - Blue Mountain Conference Center 404 12th Street, La Grande, OR
3/27/14	Wallowa-Whitman National Forest - Lions Hall 235 Lion Street, Halfway, OR
3/31/14	Blue Mountains National Forests - Red Lion Convention Center 1021 NE Grand Avenue, Portland, OR
4/1/14	Umatilla National Forest - Pendleton Convention Center, West Rooms 3 and 4 1601 Westgate, Pendleton, OR
4/2/14	Umatilla National Forest - Heppner City Hall 111 North Main, Heppner, OR
4/3/14	Umatilla National Forest - Fair Grounds Youth Building, Columbia Co. Engineer's Office 1 North Pine, Dayton, WA
4/4/14	Umatilla National Forest - Benton PUD Auditorium 2721 West 10th Avenue, Kennewick, WA

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Background

The Blue Mountains National Forests planning area covers three national forests: Umatilla (1.4 million acres), Wallowa-Whitman (1.8 million acres), and Malheur National Forests (1.7 million acres) (includes a portion of the Ochoco National Forest administered by the Malheur). A separate Record of Decision and Revised Forest Plan will be prepared for each Forest and signed by the Regional Forester; however, the analysis of effects will be together in one environmental impact statement (EIS). The three Blue Mountain forests cover a total of 4.9 million acres, excluding Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA)) spread across a 50,000 square mile landscape in eastern Oregon and southeastern Washington. There is no need for change within the HCNRA, due to a relatively recent (2003) comprehensive management plan; therefore the Forest Plan does not include the HCNRA; which brings the total acreage for this DEIS and Forest Plan to 4.9 million acres. Significant national resources include six Wilderness areas, eleven Wild and Scenic Rivers, and four Scenic Byways.

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